

Zimbabwe sees decline in crop production due to drought

By Annelie Coleman | 26 March 2024 | 5:00 am

El Niño continues its severe impact on Zimbabwe, with a marked decline in crop production. The total area planted to crops in Zimbabwe in the 2023/24 season declined 6% when compared to the previous season, that of cereals declined 6% and maize grain declined 12%.



This was ascribed to the persistent drought in that country, and the extreme drought conditions in February 2024 in particular.

According to a [report by Reuters](#), Zimbabwe's tobacco production was expected to go down by at least 10% to 265 million kg in 2024 from a record crop of 296 million kg last year because of the drought.

The area of tobacco cultivated declined 3% to 113 000ha in the current season, from 117 000ha last year. In Zimbabwe, Africa's largest tobacco producer, the crop was one of the country's main foreign currency earners.

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It brought in a record \$1,2 billion (about R22,8 billion) in 2023 from exports mostly to China.

The updated [*Southern Africa Climatic Outlook Forum*](#) seasonal forecast indicates that below-normal rainfall and dry conditions could continue across the country in April 2024.

According to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, persistent dry conditions caused a marked shortage of indigenous vegetables and fruits, green harvest and limited casual labour opportunities.

Some traders are reported to have started hoarding grains in anticipation of a poor harvest, which could cause price increases.

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The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Zimbabwe's annual blended inflation rate rose to 47,6% in February 2024 from 34,8% in January 2024. Consumer prices rose 5,4% month-on-month.

The Food Poverty Line in the local ZWL currency increased 78% compared to January 2024, while the Total Consumption Poverty Line increased 178%.

According to the [*World Food Programme's HungerMap*](#), the number of Zimbabweans facing insufficient food consumption and those employing 'crisis and above' food-based coping strategies went up over the past three months.

"The cost of the monitored minimum expenditure food basket (MEB) increased by an average of 57% for rural markets and 49% for urban markets in the local currency and remained stable in USD terms. The price of fuel rose in ZWL and remained stable in USD terms," the report said.